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Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks to NDRF personnel at the accident site in Balasore district of Odisha on Saturday; and (below) a view of the pile-up | PTI

DEBADATTA MALLICK

1. At 3.20 pm on Friday, Coromandel Express bound for Chennai leaves Howrah; passes Khantapara at 6.52 pm. Gets clearance to travel at a speed of 130 km per hour
2. At 6.55 pm, it enters a loopline at Bahanaga Bazar Station at a speed of 128 km per hour, hits a stationary goods train. 21 of its coaches fly off on impact, many of them capsize
3. At the same time, 6.55 pm, Bengaluru-Howrah Superfast Express arrives on the Down line. Derailed Coromandel coaches hit rear parts of the Howrah-bound train
4. Two coaches of the Bengaluru-Howrah Superfast Express derail on impact. A third coach got damaged but did not derail, a preliminary inspection report said
5. Locals begin rescue operations immediately. As many as 200 ambulances, 20 fire fighting teams, four Odisha disaster rapid action force teams and three NDRF teams join in

HORRIFIC PILE-UP TOLL 288

OVER 900 INJURED, AT LEAST 250 OF THEM CRITICAL; HARROWING SCENES AS DESPERATE RELATIVES LOOK FOR THEIR NEAR AND DEAR ONES; ODISHA GOVT OBSERVES DAY-LONG STATE MOURNING; MODI VISITS ACCIDENT SITE, SAYS GUILTY WILL BE PUNISHED

HEMANT KUMAR ROUT
@ Bahanaga (Odisha)

WITH the first light of dawn on Saturday, a tragedy of unimaginable proportions unfolded at Bahanaga railway station, about 180 km from Bhubaneswar. Amid frantic efforts by the rescue teams to find survivors trapped under the mangled coaches of Coromandel Express and Bengaluru-Howrah Superfast Express, relatives from different parts of West Bengal and Odisha desperately searched for their near and dear ones among piled up bodies alongside the scattered tracks at the station that was a mute witness to one of the worst rail disasters the country has ever seen.

There were scenes of chaos and despair as trapped passengers screamed for help but the rescue teams were either unable to move the capsized coaches or cut iron railings due to lack of machinery and gas cutters. By the time the men and machinery were mobilised, many had already succumbed.

As many as 288 passengers were killed and over 900 others injured, at least 250 of them critically, after the Coromandel Express rammed into a stationary goods train near the station and jumped off the track around 7 pm on Friday. Its derailed coaches hit the Bengaluru-Howrah Daily Superfast Express which was passing by. Of the 21 coaches of Coromandel Express, 15 (B4 to B13 and S1 to S5) capsized and its engine went up and landed on the goods train in the impact of the collision. Two general compartments of the Bengaluru-Howrah Superfast Express also got derailed after some of the capsized coaches of Coromandel Express collided with them.

Eyewitnesses said Coromandel Express shook like a snake after hitting the goods train and four of its coaches moved out of the railway station boundary. "The derailment occurred between Bahanaga level crossing and the station. I was waiting at the other side of the crossing gate when I saw Coromandel Express climb up the goods train and derail while two bogies of the other train veered off the track after being hit by the flying coaches of the former," said Kamalakanta Behera, a local resident.

People and vehicles, including some auto rickshaws which were halted at both sides of the railway gate, were the first responders. They retrieved the injured passengers and rushed them to the nearby hospitals.

Some of the critically injured were taken to district headquarters hospitals at Balasore and Bhadrak while more than 100 were shifted to SCB Medical College and Hospital at Cuttack after their condition deteriorated.

By the time the Balasore district administration arranged for light and other facilities, the locals had shifted several injured patients to hospitals located on both the sides of the Howrah-Chennai railway line. An auto driver ferried at least 40 times to hospitals to shift injured passengers. The state administration pressed 200 ambulances, 20 fire fighting teams, four teams of Odisha disaster rapid action force and three teams of NDRF in the rescue and relief operations.

The Odisha government observed Saturday as a day of state mourning.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who took a review meeting on the accident at New Delhi, flew down to the crash site in the afternoon to take stock of the situation and inspect the ongoing relief efforts. He was briefed on the accident by railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and education minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

The PM interacted with local authorities, disaster relief personnel, and railway officials. "It is a painful incident. The government will leave no stone unturned for the treatment of those injured. Instructions have been issued to probe it from every angle. Those found guilty will be severely punished," he assured.

LAD LEADS K'TAKA RESCUE TEAM

CM Siddaramaiah has formed a team headed by Labour Minister Santosh Lad and Karnataka Disaster Management Authority Commissioner Manoj Rajan to help the passengers from Karnataka. Lad said, "All from Karnataka, who were onboard, are safe. We have data that there were 110 passengers in reserved coaches. We are yet to get details of those in unreserved coaches. All arrangements have been made for the safe return of the stranded passengers."
Meanwhile, the CM spoke to the stranded U16 Volleyball team players and promised them all help. The players are from Tumakuru, Bengaluru, DK, Hunsur, Udupi and Raichur.

INSIDE: ACCIDENT SPOT LOOKED LIKE GRAVEYARD: SURVIVOR P5
NO KAVACH ON BOTH THE ILL-FATED EXPRESS TRAINS: P9

FIVE NIGHTMARISH SECONDS

HEMANT KUMAR ROUT AND SUDARSAN MAHARANA
@ Bahanaga (Odisha)

MANIKLAL Tewari was resting on his berth in Coromandel Express when he heard a loud bang around 7 pm on Friday. The Balasore native initially thought it was an explosion. Within moments, everything went dark and his coach was filled with smoke. It all happened in the blink of an eye — a nightmarish five seconds, as he puts it.

"The coach had overturned and an iron bar hit my head. It was a matter of five seconds. When I regained my senses, I realised I was bleeding. My side of the window was broken and it was difficult to get out in that moment of near death experience," Tewari says, still unable to believe he escaped death. He managed to wriggle out of the window on the other side and saw locals who immediately pulled him out to safety.

Not everyone had that stroke of luck. Asit Maity from East Medinipur is frantically looking for five fellow villagers with whom he had boarded the ill-fated train. They were all on their way to Kerala. While he identified one, others are still missing.

As a mountain of iron debris piled up at Bahanaga Bazar railway station in what is India's worst railway disaster involving three trains, cries for help rent the air. Locals and rescue workers even had to walk on body parts strewn across the site. Some of the scenes were too gory to describe as mutilated bodies without head, hands or legs were found on the tracks.

Nabin Chandra Soren, living in a thatched house right next to the track where the mishap occurred, rushed out of his house hearing the explosive collision. What he saw left him numbed. "Body of a loco pilot was lying near the boundary of my house. I kept it aside and along with my wife rushed to the tracks to rescue others trapped in the coaches," Soren said.

It was chaos and despair all around as trapped passengers screamed for help but rescue teams were either unable to move the capsized coaches or cut iron railings due to lack of required machinery and gas cutters in the first few hours.

CONTINUED ON: P9

INDIA'S DEADLIEST RAIL DISASTERS

JUNE 6, 1981 TOLL: 800
A passenger train fell into Bagmati River in Bihar while crossing a bridge

AUGUST 20, 1995 TOLL: 305
Purushottam Express collided with stationary Kalindi Express near Firozabad in Uttar Pradesh

AUGUST 2, 1999 TOLL: 285
Brahmaputra Mail crashed into stationary Avadh Assam Express at Gaisal station in West Bengal

NOVEMBER 26, 1998 TOLL: 212
Jammu Tawi-Sealdah Express collided with three derailed coaches of Frontier Golden Temple Mail in Khanna, Punjab

Infra failure, human error behind tragedy

B ANBUSELVAN
@ Chennai/Bhubaneswar

THE initial joint inspection report by Kharagpur railway division officials into the horrific rail tragedy revealed that the track joints were incorrectly positioned, and that the signal panel in the station master's room failed to synchronise with them at Bahanaga Bazar station. A combination of infrastructure failure and human error may have led to the tragic train accident.

While railway officials failed to explain how the locomotive (WAP7), which was pulling the Coromandel Express, ended up perched on top of the adjacent freight train, the joint inspection report indicated that the Coromandel Express, originally meant to run on the mainline, had entered the loopline where the goods train was stationed, traveling at a speed of 128 kmph. This newspaper has accessed a copy of the inspection report.

According to the report, the Coromandel Express departed from Khantapara station at 6.52 pm, proceeding along the mainline towards Bhadrak. However, track point 17A was set for the loopline, where a goods train was already stationed. Surprisingly, the signal panel in the station master's room indicated that the Coromandel Express was assigned to the mainline at its maximum permissible speed, which in the Kharagpur-Bhadrak section stands at 130 kmph.

At a speed of 128 kmph, the Coromandel Express veered onto the loopline and collided with the stationary goods train, resulting in the derailment of 21 of its coaches. This raises questions about why the signal panel failed to indicate the loopline setting when the track points were adjusted accordingly.

Just when the Coromandel rammed into the goods train, the Bengaluru-Howrah Superfast was about to cross the mainline. Some of the derailed coaches of the Coromandel Express fell onto the rear of three coaches of the Howrah-bound train, forcing them to derail as well.

CONTINUED ON: P9

DISASTER MANAGEMENT IS HYPER-COMPLEX

In an interaction, KSNDMC Director Dr Manoj Rajan gave an insight into the inner workings and intricacies of natural disaster management, how data is analysed and how technology helps poor farmers

| EXPRESS DIALOGUES: P4

Give up guarantees, trim burden, say Siddu, DKS

DEVARAJ B HIREHALLI @ Bengaluru

CHIEF Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar have appealed to the "haves" to give up the guarantees announced by the Congress government in order to help the "have-nots".

"If the 'haves' generously give up the guarantees aimed at the 'have-nots', it will help reduce the financial burden on the government. So that funds can be utilised for development works," Siddaramaiah stated in a letter.

"Many government officials, media heads and those in the private sector have written to me stating that they want to give up 'Gruha Jyothi'. Anyone willing to opt out of this scheme will be given an opportunity. When the Union Government launched a campaign asking people to give up LPG subsidy, many responded positively. Here too, the guarantees can be given up," said Shivakumar.

He said even families living in rented houses are eligible for 'Gruha Jyothi'.

P4

EXPRESS READ

Moral policing: Bond execution must

MANGALURU: To check moral policing, city police will start booking all those involved in such cases over the last five years under Sections 107 and 110. Till now, the accused of moral policing were only booked for rioting and hurt. Now, execution of bonds will act as an effective deterrent. P5

'Yuva Nidhi' only for Kannadigas: Govt

BENGALURU: The government on Saturday issued guidelines for implementing the 'Yuva Nidhi scheme' to provide financial assistance to unemployed youth. It is one of the five guarantees that the Congress had announced in the run-up to the polls. On Friday, the government announced the details of the roll-out. P5

SC stays Allahabad HC's order to examine horoscope of rape victim

SHRUTI KAKKAR @ New Delhi

THE Supreme Court in a special sitting on Saturday stayed an Allahabad High Court order directing the astrology department of the University of Lucknow to examine the horoscope of an alleged rape victim to ascertain if she is a *Manglik*. The man who was accused of raping the victim on the false promise of marriage had allegedly backed out after learning that she was a *Manglik*.

Taking suo motu cognisance of the order, a vacation bench of justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and Pankaj Mithal issued stay orders but did not express any opinion on the merits of the case. Expressing concern, Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia said, "This was totally out of context. What's this got to do with the subject matter? That apart, it involves so many other features.... This is an infringement of the right to privacy. We don't want to spell it out. We don't want to join you on this as to what astronomy has to do. We are only concerned with linking the subject matter to this issue."

According to astrology, a person born under the influence of Mars (*Mangal*) is believed to have "*Mangal* dosh". Superstitious people consider a marriage between a *Manglik* and a non-*Manglik* as inauspicious.

Terming the order as disturbing, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said the HC should not have gone into this aspect. "Astrology is a science. The only question is while entertaining application by a judicial forum can this be a consideration. The competent court cannot examine this while adjudicating this issue," Mehta added.

While the applicant's counsel before the HC had said that the marriage could not be solemnised because the victim was a Manglik, counsel for the prosecutrix submitted that she was not *Manglik*.